



# U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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## CHESAPEAKE DUCKS KILLED BY PHOSPHORUS POISONING

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Dead ducks in considerable numbers at the head of Chesapeake Bay, particularly near Spesutie Island, Maryland, caused much speculation during December and January as to the cause, and resulted in an investigation by the Biological Survey of the United States Department of Agriculture. The theory first advanced was that concussions from heavy artillery in the vicinity of the Aberdeen Proving Grounds were killing the birds, but from the investigation it is found that all the dead ducks examined had eaten phosphorus and died from poisoning.

The phosphorus was obtained by the ducks while feeding in a wild-celery bed of small area, where smoke projectiles or grenades containing that chemical had been dropped during experimental firings from the Aberdeen Proving Grounds. The number of ducks reported killed in this way was somewhat exaggerated, as is usual in such disasters, but it probably totaled at least 500 birds in the recent poisonings and may have considerably exceeded that number.

When the results of the investigation were reported to the War Department the officials promptly adopted measures to prevent a recurrence of the trouble in accordance with the recommendations of the investigator. At the time the firings were conducted it was not realized that destruction of wild birds might result, but now that the danger is known officials of the Proving Ground have arranged to modify their operations so as to cause no further mortality among waterfowl.

So far as possible devices will be employed to frighten the birds from the wild-celery beds, where particles of phosphorus may still remain undissipated, and officials have agreed to limit the firing of similar projectiles to deeper water or land areas. Possibly some further deaths may result from poisoning in the limited area where the projectiles were dropped, but it is hoped that the poison will be fully dissipated before the birds are permitted to resort there again, undisturbed by the frightening devices.

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